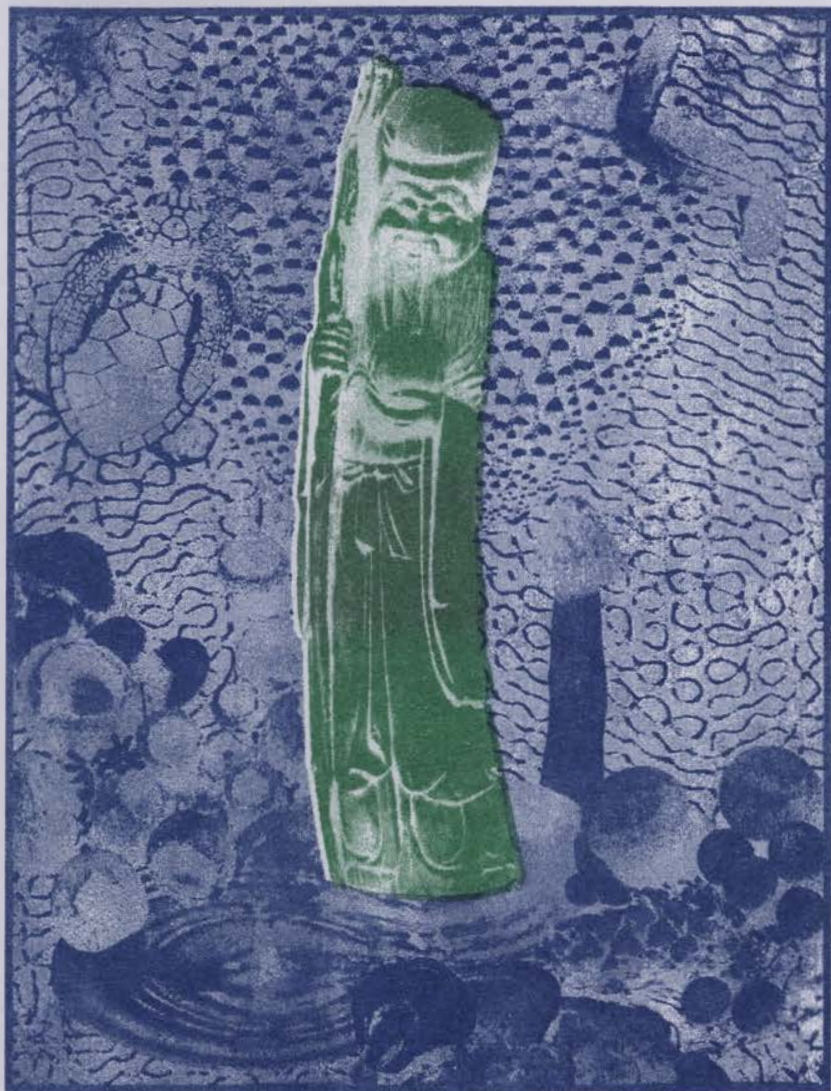


NEITHER LORD  
NOR SUBJECT



ANARCHISM  
AND EASTERN THOUGHT



*Below is the only remaining fragment from one of the earliest fully-articulated arguments regarding Anarchism. It comes from the work of the Daoist thinker Bao Jingyan and was written around 300 CE.*

## **Neither Lord Nor Subject**

*THE CONFUCIAN LITERATI SAY:*

*“Heaven gave birth to the people and then set rulers over them.”*

But how can High Heaven have said this in so many words? Is it not rather that interested parties make this their pretext? The fact is that the strong oppressed the weak and the weak submitted to them; the cunning tricked the innocent and the innocent served them. It was because there was submission that the relation of lord and subject arose, and because there was servitude that the people, being powerless, could be kept under control. Thus servitude and mastery result from the struggle between the strong and the weak and the contrast between the cunning and the innocent, and Blue Heaven has nothing whatsoever to do with it.

When the world was in its original undifferentiated state, the Nameless (*wu-ming*, that is, the Tao) was what was valued, and all creatures found happiness in self-fulfillment. Now when the cinnamon-tree has its bark stripped or the varnish-tree is cut, it is not done at the wish of the tree; when the pheasant's feathers are plucked or the king fisher's torn out, it is not done by desire of the bird. To be bitted and bridled is not in accordance with the nature of the horse; to be put under the yoke and bear burdens does not give pleasure to the ox. Cunning has its origin in the use of force that goes against the true nature of things, and the real reason for harming creatures is to provide useless adornments. Thus catching the birds of the air in order to supply frivolous adornments, making holes in noses where no holes should be, tying beasts by the leg when nature meant them to be free, is not in accord with the destiny of the myriad creatures, all born to live out their lives unharmed. And so the people are compelled to labor so that those in office may be nourished; and while their superiors enjoy fat salaries, they are reduced to the direst poverty.

It is all very well to enjoy the infinite bliss of life after death, but it is preferable not to have died in the first place; and rather than acquire an empty reputation for integrity by resigning office and foregoing one's salary, it is better that there should be no office to resign. Loyalty and righteousness only appear when rebellion breaks out in the empire, filial obedience and parental love are only displayed when there is discord among kindred.

In the earliest times, there was neither lord nor subjects. Wells were dug for drinking-water, the fields were plowed for food, work began at sunrise and ceased at sunset; everyone was free and at ease; neither competing with each other nor scheming against each other, and no one was either glorified or humiliated. The wastelands had no paths or roads and the water ways no boats or bridges, and because there were no means of communication by land or water, people did not appropriate each other's property; no armies could be formed, and so people did not attack one another. Indeed since no one climbed up to seek out nests nor dived down to sift the waters of the deep, the phoenix nested under the eaves of the house and dragons disported in the garden pool. The ravening tiger could be trodden on, the poisonous snake handled. Men could wade through swamps without raising the waterfowl, and enter the woodlands without startling the fox or the hare. Since no one even began to think of gaining power or seeking profit, no dire events or rebellions occurred; and as spears and shields were not in use, moats and ramparts did not have to be built. All creatures lived together in mystic unity, all of them merged in the Way (*Tao*). Since they were not visited by plague or pestilence, they could live out their lives and die a natural death. Their hearts being pure, they were devoid of cunning. Enjoying plentiful supplies of food, they strolled about with full bellies. Their speech was not flowery, their behavior not ostentatious. How, then, could there have been accumulation of property such as to rob the people of their wealth, or severe punishments to trap and ensnare them?

When this age entered on decadence, knowledge and cunning came into use. The Way and its Virtue (*Tao te*) having fallen into decay, a hierarchy was established. Customary regulations for promotion and degradation and for profit and loss proliferated, ceremonial garments such as the [gentry's] sash and sacrificial cap and the imperial blue and yellow [robes for worshipping Heaven and Earth] were elaborated. Buildings of earth and wood were raised high into the sky, with the beams and rafters painted red and green. The heights were overturned in quest of gems, the depths dived into in search of pearls; but however vast a collection of precious stones people might have assembled, it still would not have sufficed to satisfy their whims, and a whole mountain of gold would not have been enough to meet their expenditure, so sunk were they in depravity and vice, having transgressed against the fundamental principles of the Great Beginning. Daily they became further removed from the ways of their ancestors, and turned their back more and more upon man's original simplicity. Because they promoted the "worthy" to office, ordinary people strove for reputation, and because they prized material wealth, thieves and robbers appeared. The sight of desirable objects tempted true and honest hearts, and the display of arbitrary power and love of gain opened the road to robbery. So they made weapons with points and with sharp edges, and after that there was no end to usurpations and acts of

aggression, and they were only afraid lest crossbows should not be strong enough, shields stout enough, lances sharp enough, and defenses solid enough. Yet all this could have been dispensed with if there had been no oppression and violence from the start.

Therefore it has been said: "Who could make scepters without spoiling the unblemished jade? And how could altruism and righteousness (*jen* and *i*) be extolled unless the Way and its Virtue had perished?" Although tyrants such as Chieh and Chou were able to burn men to death, massacre their advisers, make mince-meat of the feudal lords, cut the barons into strips, tear out men's hearts and break their bones, and go to the furthest extremes of tyrannical crime down to the use of torture by roasting and grilling, however cruel they may by nature have been, how could they have done such things if they had had to remain among the ranks of the common people? If they gave way to their cruelty and lust and butchered the whole empire, it was because, as rulers, they could do as they pleased. As soon as the relationship between lord and subject is established, hearts become daily more filled with evil designs, until the manacled criminals sullenly doing forced labor in the mud and the dust are full of mutinous thoughts, the Sovereign trembles with anxious fear in his ancestral temple, and the people simmer with revolt in the midst of their poverty and distress; and to try to stop them revolting by means of rules and regulations, or control them by means of penalties and punishments, is like trying to dam a river in full flood with a handful of earth, or keeping the torrents of water back with one finger.

[Translation expropriated from Etienne Balazs, ***Chinese Civilization and Bureaucracy: Variations on a Theme***, pages 243-46. (Yale University Press, 1964).]

# **The Theory Of The Individual In Chinese Philosophy:**

**Yang-Chou**

**by Alexandra David-Néel**

We have no idea, in Europe, of the diversity of philosophical theories which have already been formulated in China. The idea that Confucius encapsulates all of the thought of the yellow world has taken hold among us and, readily, judging the Chinese through the discourses of this Master, we believe them irremediably devoted to the “happy medium” and incapable of any extreme attitudes. This isn’t the case.

The Celestial Empire, shaking off the ancient torpor to which it had given in and forced by Western nations to leave behind its antique ideals of peace and tranquility, is seeking to shore up, on new foundations, its life and activities. A large number of Chinese, one cannot ignore, in their haste to transform themselves, seem to be throwing all of the philosophical heritage they have received from their forebears overboard. From a once manifest disdain for the Western “barbarians,” they are passing too easily, in the intellectual classes, to a perhaps exaggerated respect for their methods and their theories. However, such a centuries-old atavism as that of China does not go back on everything it once stood for in a few brief years. Too many generations were raised with a veneration for the antique wisdom for a large number of modern partisans of social reforms to not turn their eyes to the masters of the past. They should be praised for it. Without wanting to weigh the value of the philosophers we’ve adopted, the Chinese can find, in the thinkers of their race, all of the speculative and social ideas put forth by ours. There has been no lack of people, in China, who’ve realized it.

Whether it was born by this observation or by the persistent love of tradition, there exists, in China, an interesting and prominent movement to bring attention to certain philosophers whose theories seem to be appropriate for leading minds down the path of the social reforms and transformations that all enlightened men know to be indispensable and inevitable. If one is to make – unjustly, perhaps, in a certain regard – the official philosopher responsible for the stagnation China is suffering in its mentality, its civilization and its science, then one may turn, at times, to some of those excommunicated from the Confucian orthodoxy. These defeated ones, these cursed ones are brought back to light and, if not glorified, at least commentated on with ardor.

It is in this way that many Chinese works have been, in recent times, devoted to Meh-ti. It would have been bizarre, in effect, that, frequently in Europe where the word “solidarity” is, for the moment, in great fashion, the lettered Chinese have not realized that they have, among their illustrious thinkers, the great ancestor of all solidarity thinkers.<sup>1</sup>

But the apology of solidarity aside, aside from demonstrating its necessity for assuring the life and perpetuation of all social grouping, the Chinese intellectuals may have encountered, from us, a tendency toward individualism, toward the affirmation of the personality with its own life more and more freed from external hindrances, a tendency that marks rather, the evolution of superior beings. In reading Max Stirner or other apologists of the intense and complete life, they will be reminded that, many centuries before we heard them, the bold lessons that today terrify many among us were given to them and the name Yang-Tchou will come alive again as does his contemporary, Meh-ti.

For us, spectators surprised by this reawakening of the Extreme-Orient that we thought, still but a few years ago, a sluggish prey ready to be carved up by western greed, the history of thought of the surprising yellow race is of exceptional interest. Better yet, and more sure than what can be drawn from superficial facts, it is capable of letting us glimpse into the destiny of a people whose spirit hides, full of surprises, behind a “great wall” a thousand times more impenetrable than the one enclosing their territory.

Our biographical information on Yang-tchou reveals little. It appears that he lived in Daliang, capital of the State of Wei, circa the fifth century BC. We have reason to believe that he was a landowner of a small rural area. It does not appear that he ever held public office, contrary to many other philosophers who were functionaries of a more or less high ranking. This particularity is, for that matter, in perfect accord with the general tendency of his doctrine.

We possess no work, or fragment of a work, that we can attribute directly, either to Yang-chou or his immediate disciples. One chapter of a book by Lieh-tse is the unique source of our documents.

Lieh-tse was a part of the Taoist school. It is quite strange to find in his work this sort of enclave comprising chapter or book VII, which is devoted to very different theories from those he himself professed. We have no precise opinion on the way this heterogeneous addition took place.

I simply do not want to be weighed down by questions of details that can only interest orientalist. I daresay that if the personality of Yang-chou had absolutely no real existence, it means little to us. We aren't worried about a

man, but a theory, a special manifestation of Chinese thought. Nevertheless, Yang-chou is truly a real figure. His name and his œuvre are cited quite clearly by such authors as Meng-tse (Mencius) and Chuang-tse. If we must be ignorant as to the peripeteias of his life, we cannot place, in any way, as they have to Lieh-tse, his real existence into doubt.

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Yang-tchou is not well known in Europe, outside of a limited circle of erudite orientalist.

Not a single study has yet been published on him in the French language. Abroad, the German sinologist Ernst Faber, gave us a translation of Yang-chou embedded, as in the original Chinese, in the work of Lieh-tse. The English sinologue, James Legge, has published a few fragments in the prolegomena of his translation of Meng-tse. I can mention, if only for the record, a few lines of analysis dedicated to Yang-chou by de Harlez. They are too simply brief to give an idea of this philosopher. Lastly, most recently, Dr. Forke published a very remarkable biography on this subject in English. His study is, by far the most interesting and the most complete; I would add that it seemed to me imbued by a philosophical spirit and a comprehension of the author it's translating which are, too often, lacking in many works in this genre.

I would be tempted to apply to Yang-chou the denomination of anarchist. Unfortunately, the term is so denatured, so distorted, that one can barely hear the simple etymological signification. It is to this that we must return if we want to attribute this proud epithet, wasted on the ignorance of the masses, to our philosopher. From the privative a, and archy, commandment, we have no commandment, and this absolute negator of arbitrary commandment, of exterior law, of all precepts whose principle does not emanate from us and does not have us for object and end, is, par excellence, personified by Yang-chou.

None has felt with more intensity than he the horror of constraint, of artificial morals, of codes imposing on individuals a behavior in flagrant contradiction with the imperative injunctions of the nature in them.

No commandments! Live your life! Live your instinct! Let your organism blossom and evolve according to its deep constitutive elements. Be yourself! ... Such is the language of Yang-chou. He states it without anger, quietly and with the placidity which forms the basis of the Chinese character. More than the affirmations of this prince of "amoralists" themselves, the peaceful assurance with which he brushes the most ingrained principles aside, disposes of the most unquestionable duties, troubled his Christian translators. The singular simplicity of expression of this "negator of the sacred", as Stirner would have said, appeared to them more appalling than the most thundering blasphemes.



A breath of terror passed through their souls and they saw standing before them the ironic and terrifying face of the "Devil". Maybe the old philosopher can still shatter more than one conscience among his new readers. I will not dare to guarantee the contrary.

The amorality of Yang-chou, the invitations he addresses to us to live our life completely, to walk "as our heart guides us," are based on, in part, the brevity of our days and on the absence, in his works, of speculative theories regarding post mortem existence. Yang-chou refused to go beyond tangible truths. — What is there above the dissolution of the elements forming our individual sensibility? ... The philosopher can say nothing to us about it. One can observe that Chinese thinkers have, in general, kept prudently silent on our destinies across the tomb. It is only among inferior classes of the population where fantastical descriptions of heaven and hell thrive. The cultured Chinese is rationalist by temperament. Yet, while this question, by a sort of tacit agreement, was set aside from the philosophical discourses and played no role in the determination of normal and reasonable conduct one should offer man, Yang-chou made it, as it were, the lynchpin of his teaching. All of the advice he gives us looks toward an individuality that is eminently transitory, that tomorrow will be "dust and decay" with nothing remaining, if not a good or a bad memory, a few words of praise or blame that it will never hear.

The other guiding principle of Yang-chou's teachings, less openly expressed, perhaps, but easy to draw from numerous discourses, is an absolute faith to the law of Causality. Our philosopher is a convicted determinist. Not in the tepid and illogical way that most Westerners who adorn themselves with this title – all the while conserving in them the remainder of atavistic ideas, delighting in the belief of the divine, the free arbitrator, the arbitrary, going by a disguised name – but with the rigorous rectitude of reasoning and deduction. And that's the explanation of his glorification of life: intense, complete, and absent of all artificial barriers. Our instincts are the voice with which the law proper to the elements whose agglomeration constitutes our person expresses itself. They come from the very essence of the molecules that produce them. That which is, is that which cannot not be. It even seems that Yang-thou, attaching each and every one of these isolated manifestations to the one and only law, adopts all of them, even the most divergent, into one grand act of faith in the harmony, in the beauty of the universal order. The World, he says to presumptuous moralists, is not concerned with your solitudes, your virtues, the reforms which you claim to make upon it, the barriers which you, under the pretext of making it better, oppose its spontaneous manifestations. The World is Perfect. Your own order, dwarfed by narrow vision, is but disorder. Let nature do what it will and all will be fine.

The same considerations serve to prop up the famous discourse on "the hair". This discourse is historic; it must have had, in its time, a huge impact,

and Meng-tse mentions it with indignation: "If in sacrificing one of your hairs you could benefit to the whole universe, you must not sacrifice it." Some unexpected and striking developments came about around this paradoxical theme. It is very regrettable that the controversies, the apologies, the commentaries, which were certainly numerous, to which this sensational doctrine must have given birth, are unknown to us.

It has nothing to do with here, as one might think, a coarse and banal egoism, but with logically rationalized theories. Whatever one might say, it is not a call to frenetic enjoyment that comes out of the theories of Yang-chou, but the indication of a rule of thought and action that the philosopher holds to be rational.

Yang-chou does not get lost in the pride of metaphysical dissertations. Certainly, he is inclined to believe that the diverse movements through which our instinct guides us are coordinated by the universal order. The hypothesis is plausible, probable; he adheres to it, readily, but, in sum, problems of this genre exceed our scope and cannot but tickle our fancies. The reasonable man knows it. He also knows that, whatever this infinite universe around him might be, practically, he is himself the center and his only end. He is aware of the outside world only through himself and, when his consciousness fades, his universe will sink with it. It is for this reason that I believed I could recall the declaration of Max Stirner in regards to Yang-chou: "Nothing is, for me, above me." It seemed to me to be capable of summing up an entire aspect of his doctrine. I have, moreover, while accounting for the difference in expression, found a profound resemblance between the old Chinese thinker and the modern German philosopher.

Another connection seems to become apparent: that between Yang-chou and Epicurus. Translators of Yang-chou, cited above, stopped themselves here, without entering, for that matter, into any development on this subject. Does the possible comparison between the two philosophers go below the surface and can it be taken all the way to the basic conceptions that form the bases of their theories? ... I believe, for my part, that there are certain notable divergences, but I won't dare to venture to sketch them out in a few lines.

It would have been interesting to see how Yang-chou understood the application of his theories in social life. But our curiosity will never be satisfied. While Meh-di wrote at length on how his law of solidarity should be understood and applied, Yang-chou did not envisage, in any of his works, the social organization of the country. Is this gap due to the fact that the texts which address this question have not reached us, or did the philosopher truly leave it aside? We cannot profess to know. Doubtless, if Yang-chou had entered this territory, we would not have seen him demonstrate that his law of egoism and free expansion of individual instincts fits with a society where, without

hypocritical demonstrations, but practically, men would support one another mutually with more usefulness and benevolence. Did Meh-ti not establish, in this way, that intensive “Universal Love”, solidarity and altruism would serve, more than any other procedure, the interests of our egoism?

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A single exception, perhaps, among the thinkers of his time and place, Yang-chou stands out almost as boldly, today, among our modern philosophers. While our contemporary societies, rejecting old dogmas on the one hand, and, clinging stubbornly to the educational systems and the moral formulas they issue on the other, debate one another in an incoherent confusion, we may find some interest – and maybe enjoyment – in listening to the lessons of this independent spirit.

When, considering, in its wake, the crowd of people heading for the tomb, bound by prejudices and sinking into the fatal chasm without ever having suspected what it means to live, we cry out with him: *How do they differ from criminals in chains?* Perhaps we would be closer to a real comprehension of existence, closer, at the very least, to finding whether there is, outside of the burlesque and tragic manner with which we conceive individual life and social relations, another, more normal, way of being and, leaving, more fertile with joy.

If Yang-chou can incite us to pursue this research, inspire in us this audacious – and more arduous to realize than one thinks – resolution to live the fullest life we might hold in our embrace by us and for us, to hold such a lesson of virile and intelligent energy in our heart and in our spirit will be, more than ever, useful and beneficial.

1. **Historical Note:** This recently translated essay was first published in 1906 as “Les Theories Individualistes dans La Philosophie Chinoise: Yang-Chou” by Alexandra David-Neel in *Mercure de France*. In 1909 it was reprinted in pamphlet form by a small anarchist press under the title “Un ‘Stirner’ Chinois” and credited to “Mitra”, a pen name David-Neel sometimes used.

# A Chinese Sage

by Oscar Wilde

An eminent Oxford theologian once remarked that his only objection to modern progress was that it progressed forward instead of backward—a view that so fascinated a certain artistic undergraduate that he promptly wrote an essay upon some unnoticed analogies between the development of ideas and the movements of the common sea-crab. I feel sure the Speaker will not be suspected even by its most enthusiastic friends of holding this dangerous heresy of retrogression. But I must candidly admit that I have come to the conclusion that the most caustic criticism of modern life I have met with for some time is that contained in the writings of the learned Chuang Tzu, recently translated into the vulgar tongue by Mr. Herbert Giles, Her Majesty's Consul at Tamsui.

The spread of popular education has no doubt made the name of this great thinker quite familiar to the general public, but, for the sake of the few and the over-cultured, I feel it my duty to state definitely who he was, and to give a brief outline of the character of his philosophy.

Chuang Tzu, whose name must carefully be pronounced as it is not written, was born in the fourth century before Christ, by the banks of the Yellow River, in the Flowery Land; and portraits of the wonderful sage seated on the flying dragon of contemplation may still be found on the simple tea-trays and pleasing screens of many of our most respectable suburban households. The honest ratepayer and his healthy family have no doubt often mocked at the dome-like forehead of the philosopher, and laughed over the strange perspective of the landscape that lies beneath him. If they really knew who he was, they would tremble. For Chuang Tzu spent his life in preaching the great creed of Inaction, and in pointing out the uselessness of all useful things. 'Do nothing, and everything will be done,' was the doctrine which he inherited from his great master Lao Tzu. To resolve action into thought, and thought into abstraction, was his wicked transcendental aim. Like the obscure philosopher of early Greek speculation, he believed in the identity of contraries; like Plato, he was an idealist, and had all the idealist's contempt for utilitarian systems; he was a mystic like Dionysius, and Scotus Erigena, and Jacob Bohme, and held, with them and with Philo, that the object of life was to get rid of self-consciousness, and to become the unconscious vehicle of a higher illumination. In fact, Chuang Tzu may be said to have summed up in himself almost every mood of European metaphysical or mystical thought, from Heraclitus down to Hegel. There was something in him of the Quietist also; and in his worship of Nothing he may be said to have in some measure anticipated those strange dreamers of mediaeval days who, like Tauler and Master Eckhart, adored the *purum nihil* and the Abyss. The great middle classes of this country, to whom, as we all know, our prosperity, if not our civilization,

is entirely due, may shrug their shoulders over all this and ask, with a certain amount of reason, what is the identity of contraries to them, and why they should get rid of that self-consciousness which is their chief characteristic. But Chuang Tzu was something more than a metaphysician and an illuminist. He sought to destroy society, as we know it, as the middle classes know it; and the sad thing is that he combines with the passionate eloquence of a Rousseau the scientific reasoning of a Herbert Spencer. There is nothing of the sentimentalist in him. He pities the rich more than the poor, if he ever pities at all, and prosperity seems to him as tragic a thing as suffering. He has nothing of the modern sympathy with failures, nor does he propose that the prizes should always be given on moral grounds to those who come in last in the race. It is the race itself that he objects to; and as for active sympathy, which has become the profession of so many worthy people in our own day, he thinks that trying to make others good is as silly an occupation as 'beating a drum in a forest in order to find a fugitive.' It is a mere waste of energy. That is all. While, as for a thoroughly sympathetic man, he is, in the eyes of Chuang Tzu, simply a man who is always trying to be somebody else, and so misses the only possible excuse for his own existence.

Yes; incredible as it may seem, this curious thinker looked back with a sigh of regret to a certain Golden Age when there were no competitive examinations, no wearisome educational systems, no missionaries, no penny dinners for the people, no Established Churches, no Humanitarian Societies, no dull lectures about one's duty to one's neighbor, and no tedious sermons about any subject at all. In those ideal days, he tells us, people loved each other without being conscious of charity, or writing to the newspapers about it. They were upright, and yet they never published books upon Altruism. As every man kept his knowledge to himself, the world escaped the curse of skepticism; and as every man kept his virtues to himself, nobody meddled in other people's business. They lived simple and peaceful lives, and were contented with such food and raiment as they could get. Neighboring districts were in sight, and 'the cocks and dogs of one could be heard in the other,' yet the people grew old and died without ever interchanging visits. There was no chattering about clever men, and no laudation of good men. The intolerable sense of obligation was unknown. The deeds of humanity left no trace, and their affairs were not made a burden for posterity by foolish historians.

In an evil moment the Philanthropist made his appearance, and brought with him the mischievous idea of Government. 'There is such a thing,' says Chuang Tzu, 'as leaving mankind alone: there has never been such a thing as governing mankind.' All modes of government are wrong. They are unscientific, because they seek to alter the natural environment of man; they are immoral because, by interfering with the individual, they produce the most aggressive forms of egotism; they are ignorant, because they try to spread

education; they are self-destructive, because they engender anarchy. 'Of old,' he tells us, 'the Yellow Emperor first caused charity and duty to one's neighbor to interfere with the natural goodness of the heart of man. In consequence of this, Yao and Shun wore the hair off their legs in endeavoring to feed their people. They disturbed their internal economy in order to find room for artificial virtues. They exhausted their energies in framing laws, and they were failures.' Man's heart, our philosopher goes on to say, may be 'forced down or stirred up,' and in either case the issue is fatal. Yao made the people too happy, so they were not satisfied. Chieh made them too wretched, so they grew discontented. Then everyone began to argue about the best way of tinkering up society. 'It is quite clear that something must be done,' they said to each other, and there was a general rush for knowledge. The results were so dreadful that the Government of the day had to bring in Coercion, and as a consequence of this 'virtuous men sought refuge in mountain caves, while rulers of state sat trembling in ancestral halls.' Then, when everything was in a state of perfect chaos, the Social Reformers got up on platforms, and preached salvation from the ills that they and their system had caused. The poor Social Reformers! 'They know not shame, nor what it is to blush,' is the verdict of Chuang Tzu upon them.

The economic question, also, is discussed by this almond-eyed sage at great length, and he writes about the curse of capital as eloquently as Mr. Hyndman. The accumulation of wealth is to him the origin of evil. It makes the strong violent, and the weak dishonest. It creates the petty thief, and puts him in a bamboo cage. It creates the big thief, and sets him on a throne of white jade. It is the father of competition, and competition is the waste, as well as the destruction, of energy. The order of nature is rest, repetition, and peace. Weariness and war are the results of an artificial society based upon capital; and the richer this society gets, the more thoroughly bankrupt it really is, for it has neither sufficient rewards for the good nor sufficient punishments for the wicked. There is also this to be remembered—that the prizes of the world degrade a man as much as the world's punishments. The age is rotten with its worship of success. As for education, true wisdom can neither be learnt nor taught. It is a spiritual state, to which he who lives in harmony with nature attains. Knowledge is shallow if we compare it with the extent of the unknown, and only the unknowable is of value. Society produces rogues, and education makes one rogue cleverer than another. That is the only result of School Boards. Besides, of what possible philosophic importance can education be, when it serves simply to make each man differ from his neighbor? We arrive ultimately at a chaos of opinions, doubt everything, and fall into the vulgar habit of arguing; and it is only the intellectually lost who ever argue. Look at Hui Tzu. 'He was a man of many ideas. His works would fill five carts. But his doctrines were paradoxical.' He said that there were feathers in an egg, because there were feathers on a chicken; that a dog could be a

sheep, because all names were arbitrary; that there was a moment when a swiftly-flying arrow was neither moving nor at rest; that if you took a stick a foot long, and cut it in half every day, you would never come to the end of it; and that a bay horse and a dun cow were three, because taken separately they were two, and taken together they were one, and one and two made up three. 'He was like a man running a race with his own shadow, and making a noise in order to drown the echo. He was a clever gadfly, that was all. What was the use of him?'

Morality is, of course, a different thing. It went out of fashion, says Chuang Tzu, when people began to moralize. Men ceased then to be spontaneous and to act on intuition. They became priggish and artificial, and were so blind as to have a definite purpose in life. Then came Governments and Philanthropists, those two pests of the age. The former tried to coerce people into being good, and so destroyed the natural goodness of man. The latter were a set of aggressive busybodies who caused confusion wherever they went. They were stupid enough to have principles, and unfortunate enough to act up to them. They all came to bad ends, and showed that universal altruism is as bad in its results as universal egotism. They 'tripped people up over charity, and fettered them with duties to their neighbors.' They gushed over music, and fussed over ceremonies. As a consequence of all this, the world lost its equilibrium, and has been staggering ever since.

Who, then, according to Chuang Tzu, is the perfect man? And what is his manner of life? The perfect man does nothing beyond gazing at the universe. He adopts no absolute position. 'In motion, he is like water. At rest, he is like a mirror. And, like Echo, he answers only when he is called upon.' He lets externals take care of themselves. Nothing material injures him; nothing spiritual punishes him. His mental equilibrium gives him the empire of the world. He is never the slave of objective existences. He knows that, 'just as the best language is that which is never spoken, so the best action is that which is never done.' He is passive, and accepts the laws of life. He rests in inactivity, and sees the world become virtuous of itself. He does not try to 'bring about his own good deeds.' He never wastes himself on effort. He is not troubled about moral distinctions. He knows that things are what they are, and that their consequences will be what they will be. His mind is the 'speculum of creation,' and he is ever at peace.

All this is of course excessively dangerous, but we must remember that Chuang Tzu lived more than two thousand years ago, and never had the opportunity of seeing our unrivalled civilization. And yet it is possible that, were he to come back to earth and visit us, he might have something to say to Mr. Balfour about his coercion and active misgovernment in Ireland; he might smile at some of our philanthropic ardors, and shake his head over many of our organized charities; the School Board might not impress him, nor our race

for wealth stir his admiration; he might wonder at our ideals, and grow sad over what we have realized. Perhaps it is well that Chuang Tzu cannot return.

Meanwhile, thanks to Mr. Giles and Mr. Quaritch, we have his book to console us, and certainly it is a most fascinating and delightful volume. Chuang Tzu is one of the Darwinians before Darwin. He traces man from the germ, and sees his unity with nature. As an anthropologist he is excessively interesting, and he describes our primitive arboreal ancestor living in trees through his terror of animals stronger than himself, and knowing only one parent, the mother, with all the accuracy of a lecturer at the Royal Society. Like Plato, he adopts the dialogue as his mode of expression, 'putting words into other people's mouths,' he tells us, 'in order to gain breadth of view.' As a storyteller he is charming. The account of the visit of the respectable Confucius to the great Robber Che is most vivid and brilliant, and it is impossible not to laugh over the ultimate discomfiture of the sage, the barrenness of whose moral platitudes is ruthlessly exposed by the successful brigand. Even in his metaphysics, Chuang Tzu is intensely humorous. He personifies his abstractions, and makes them act plays before us. The Spirit of the Clouds, when passing eastward through the expanse of air, happened to fall in with the Vital Principle. The latter was slapping his ribs and hopping about: whereupon the Spirit of the Clouds said, 'Who are you, old man, and what are you doing?' 'Strolling!' replied the Vital Principle, without stopping, for all activities are ceaseless. 'I want to know something,' continued the Spirit of the Clouds. 'Ah!' cried the Vital Principle, in a tone of disapprobation, and a marvellous conversation follows, that is not unlike the dialogue between the Sphinx and the Chimera in Flaubert's curious drama. Talking animals, also, have their place in Chuang Tzu's parables and stories, and through myth and poetry and fancy his strange philosophy finds musical utterance.

Of course it is sad to be told that it is immoral to be consciously good, and that doing anything is the worst form of idleness. Thousands of excellent and really earnest philanthropists would be absolutely thrown upon the rates if we adopted the view that nobody should be allowed to meddle in what does not concern him. The doctrine of the uselessness of all useful things would not merely endanger our commercial supremacy as a nation, but might bring discredit upon many prosperous and serious-minded members of the shop-keeping classes. What would become of our popular preachers, our Exeter Hall orators, our drawing-room evangelists, if we said to them, in the words of Chuang Tzu, 'Mosquitoes will keep a man awake all night with their biting, and just in the same way this talk of charity and duty to one's neighbor drives us nearly crazy. Sirs, strive to keep the world to its own original simplicity, and, as the wind bloweth where it listeth, so let Virtue establish itself. Wherefore this undue energy?' And what would be the fate of governments and professional politicians if we came to the conclusion that there is no such thing as



governing mankind at all? It is clear that Chuang Tzu is a very dangerous writer, and the publication of his book in English, two thousand years after his death, is obviously premature, and may cause a great deal of pain to many thoroughly respectable and industrious persons. It may be true that the ideal of self-culture and self-development, which is the aim of his scheme of life, and the basis of his scheme of philosophy, is an ideal somewhat needed by an age like ours, in which most people are so anxious to educate their neighbors that they have actually no time left in which to educate themselves. But would it be wise to say so? It seems to me that if we once admitted the force of any one of Chuang Tzu's destructive criticisms we should have to put some check on our national habit of self-glorification; and the only thing that ever consoles man for the stupid things he does is the praise he always gives himself for doing them. There may, however, be a few who have grown wearied of that strange modern tendency that sets enthusiasm to do the work of the intellect. To these, and such as these, Chuang Tzu will be welcome. But let them only read him. Let them not talk about him. He would be disturbing at dinner-parties, and impossible at afternoon teas, and his whole life was a protest against platform speaking. 'The perfect man ignores self; the divine man ignores action; the true sage ignores reputation.' These are the principles of Chuang Tzu.

---The Speaker, February 8, 1890

[The Book Under Discussion: *Chuang Tzu: Mystic, Moralist, and Social Reformer*. Translated from the Chinese by Herbert A. Giles, H.B.M.'s Consul at Tamsui. (Bernard Quaritch.)]



**Suggested Reading**

**For Life** by Alexandra David-Neel  
(*Enemy Combatant Publications*)

**Tsuji Jun: Japanese Dadaist, Anarchist, Philosopher,  
Monk**  
by Erana Jae Taylor  
(*Enemy Combatant Publications*)

**Yang Chou's Garden of Pleasure**

**The Power of Nothingness**  
by Alexandra David-Neel and Lama Yongden  
(*Nihil Obstat Publishing*)

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